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ABSTRACT

The learning disabilities monograph contains five brief articles dealing with various aspects of learning disabilities as they related to business education. "Learning Disabilities: A Challenge for the Vocational Business Educator" (Dorothy Munger) concerns screening students with learning disabilities into rather than out of business education classes. "The Atypical Student in Basic Business Courses" (Robert E. Schick) discusses the various factors which bear on students' learning and which teachers need to consider when locating, diagnosing, and correcting learning problems in basic business classes. "Learning and Reading Disabilities" (Walter B. Barbe and Raymond Swassing) examines the differences between learning and reading disabilities, offers suggestions for helping students with reading disabilities, and discusses the need for providing students with a feeling of success. "Math? Yech:" (Carolyn Brenner) simulates a classroom situation in which the teacher interests students of below-average computational ability in learning to compute, and offers eight suggested ways of fostering computational skills. "Understanding and Teaching the Discouraged Student with Learning and Emotional Problems" (Paul Painter, M.D.) discusses the nature of learning and emotional disorders and the origins and development of learning disabilities, and makes suggestions to classroom teachers for successfully teaching students with such problems. An annotated bibliography is appended. (JR)

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LEARNING DISABILITIES

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THOUGHTS RELATIVE TO LEARNING DISABILITIES
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"Learning Disability is essentially a problem of perception and perceptual disorder. Teachers of children with such disability need to know something more than they now do if pupils are to receive adequate help." (William M. Cruickshank, Director, Institute for the Study of Mental Retardation and Related Disabilities, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor)

* * * * *

"Learning Disability is a technical concept which, since 1963, has been subverted to mean just about anything that educators wished to sweep into this bin. The subversion of the term and the concept, essentially to meet the needs of educators, has been a tragedy. This tragedy is compounded by many well-intentioned persons as well as by agency administrators who may never have had a thorough understanding of it . . . ." (*Ibid.*)

* * * * *

"Learning Disability is not a problem characteristic only of children above an intelligence quotient level of 80. Federal, state, and local regulations and definitions pertaining to these children which state to the contrary are definitely in error." (*Ibid.*)

* * * * *

"In reviewing the professional literature in the field, Samuel Clements has recorded 38 terms which are used synonymously with learning disabilities and, moreover, has found at least 100 symptoms which have been attributed to children given this label." (West and Millsom, Special Education Program, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor)

* * * * *

"Current experience indicates that an interdisciplinary task-oriented team mechanism may be a first step toward a comprehensive successful approach to the yet unsolved dilemma of the handicapped child in our educational society." (Murray M. Kappelman, M.D., Professor, Department of Pediatrics, School of Medicine, University of Maryland, Baltimore)

* * * * *

"Despite the recency of its recognition and funding, the field of learning disabilities is showing remarkable growth. Such growth may be an index of the great need in this area." (West and Millsom, Special Education Program, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor)

* * * * *

"More teachers need to be able to identify and to work intelligently with the child who evidences specific and significant deficits in learning performance." (Eleanore T. Kenney, Director, the Miriam School, Webster Groves, Missouri)

* * * * *

Children with learning disabilities will continue to meet reversals and frustration until such time as a total effort to meet these needs is undertaken by all educators." (Calvin Davis, Administrative Assistant for Pupil Rights and Responsibilities, Charlotte-Mecklenberg Public Schools, Charlotte, North Carolina)

LEARNING DISABILITIES

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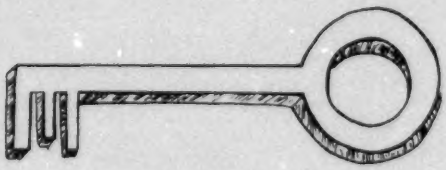

PREFACE

Business educators have had a "persecution complex" and frustration for years because they believe that many students in their classes are "non-learners" who are low in intelligence, low in scholarship, low in a desire to learn, and high in behavior problems. Many students do have physical, perceptual or emotional disorders which require the treatment of specialists. The depth of their handicaps is currently under scrutiny by many people including those quoted on the previous page.

Perhaps the writers of this monograph have shed light on certain types of student learning problems existing in secondary schools in all academic areas. Business teachers should, as professionals, be concerned about working with each student as an individual in helping alleviate the cause for the learning problem itself, not only the symptoms. Youth of secondary school age may not have benefitted from the research now in progress diagnosing learning disability at an early age. The business teacher should realize when a referral should be given the student for assistance through the counseling office and on to specialists. However, the business teacher should be prepared to offer "first aid" in reading and mathematical computation as the need becomes apparent.

This monograph is the third in a series designed to highlight areas of great concern to business educators, and to expand certain areas of *Business Education for the Seventies* (1972). *Career Education Activated by Business Educators in Illinois* (1973) and *Individualized Learning Activated by Business Educators in Illinois* (1974) were written by Illinois practitioners. In this *Learning Disabilities* monograph, other professional specialists have been included due to the technical nature of the issues discussed. The Illinois Business Education Association is indebted to Miss Brenner and to Drs. Barbe, Swassing, and Painter who responded so willingly and eloquently when the editors requested that they share their thinking with Illinois business teachers.

The Association also expresses appreciation to its members who have contributed their expertise and experience in writing for the publications named above. Writesman Long of Kankakee Community College has demonstrated excellent judgment in readying the manuscripts for the composer, and Bev Hackett of Leyden District 212 has contributed creative ideas in terms of design. Jack Tomaselli of Fairchild Printing has consistently given fine assistance and service.

Mary Ann Lynn

Mary Ann Lynn, President
Illinois Business Education Association

LEARNING DISABILITIES: A CHALLENGE FOR THE VOCATIONAL BUSINESS EDUCATOR

Dorothy Munger
Assistant Principal
Champaign Central High School
Champaign, Illinois
(Formerly teacher of typewriting, shorthand, office procedures)

Vocational business education teachers have traditionally been occupied with screening out students who, they thought, would not be able to succeed in business education courses, such as shorthand and accounting. Their action was many times well intended; their goal seemed educationally sound, which was to place students in courses where they could succeed.

Those who were screened out because they did not fit the preconceived mold generally were the dull normal, the retarded in basics such as reading and mathematics, the emotionally disturbed, the mentally handicapped, the culturally different, or the physically disabled. They were tossed aside like so much educational debris. Even though these students had indicated an interest in some kind of business career, this factor was ignored if they failed to survive the screening devices used by the teachers.

The idea that the self-image of these rejected students could have been damaged by this disinterest did not concern, maybe not even occur to, most of the business educators. The screened-out students were shunted off to some other department with the excuse that the newly assigned teachers might be better prepared to handle their particular learning problems.

Consider the problems of Molly and Inez. Should they have been discouraged from enrolling in a business program, from pursuing a business career that could utilize their capabilities?

MOLLY

Molly was a high school junior, paralyzed on her left side, unable to use her left hand, and mentally retarded. About all she had going for her was a good right hand, her interest in some kind of a business position, a desire to be self-supporting, and a cheerful disposition. Could a business department help a student with these multiple handicaps? Yes! With the help of the local Vocational Rehabilitation Office, a typewriter was obtained which was specially constructed for a person with only a usable right hand. Molly was registered in a clerical typing class designed for students with learning handicaps of various kinds. She acquired a usable skill and, after high school graduation, furthered her education in the business area at a trade school under the sponsorship of the State Vocational Rehabilitation Department.

INEZ

Inez was an emotionally-disturbed child of divorced parents. Following her parents' divorce, she lived with her mother and five small sisters and brothers. Her rebellion against the strict discipline in the home prompted her to run away, to live with her father whose permissive philosophy was "do anything you want to do as long as you don't get caught." She developed friends whose influence was very negative and antisocial (a number of them were indicted for armed robbery). She was torn between a desire to finish her business training in high school and the need to take more of her time to aid those friends who were in serious trouble. Her attendance became very irregular. Give her up as a lost cause? No! Her business teacher requested assistance from social workers. Her father was contacted for more positive support. Realistic arrangements were made for her to complete her business assignments so she would not be discouraged. Her decision to drop out of school was reversed by the interest of her teachers. She is now enrolled in a business-related cooperative career education program with June graduation her goal.

Business educators are more adequately assuming their responsibility for students with learning disabilities than they did in the past. In the last few years, professional business education publications have abounded in materials designed to interest business teachers in the plight of young people with special needs and to guide this interest into teaching methods that would meet the needs of these students. Business educators, on both the college and secondary levels, have devoted time and effort to lectures and professional writing which stress how best to help these students develop competencies within their ability range, thus enabling them to find satisfying employment in the business world.

SCREEN THEM IN—NOT OUT should be the theme of business education for the 1970's! If students cannot understand the vocabulary of the recordkeeping or accounting text, don't depend on the text alone. Determine what words are barriers to understanding basic concepts and principles and help these students build the vocabulary necessary for comprehension. Teachers may need to explain principles in ways different from the textbook. A teacher who feels compelled to "go by the book" and is not creative or interested enough to develop alternative devices and methods is not meeting the needs of students with learning problems.

The attitude of ignoring these learning problems by "passing the buck" or letting the next teacher do it must continue to change. However, a changed attitude must be translated into a knowledge of HOW best to deal with the learning problems these students have in such areas as mathematics and reading, which are basic to learning success in business education.

It is the purpose of this monograph to help business educators become sensitive to the needs of students with learning disabilities and to give teachers ideas and methods for helping these students cope with their inadequacies. These students may then be better prepared in high school to assume their roles as wage earners in our business community.

THE ATYPICAL STUDENT IN BASIC BUSINESS COURSES
Initial Considerations

Robert E. Schick
Morton West High School
Berwyn, Illinois

"Hey, Teach, why do I have to learn this junk when I'm only a freshman?" John questioned.

"Credit is a valuable economic tool of our society and its correct use by citizens is mandatory if our country is to grow properly," explained the teacher.

"Big deal. I can't get credit now so why tell me about it and have me work these hard math problems?" John retorted.

"Because the textbook feels it will make you a better consumer," the teacher snapped back.

Does this sound familiar? It occurs daily in our schools. John may do poorly in general business, or fail, due to any number of reasons, but let's not blatantly label him as a student with a serious learning deficiency without first evaluating his total developmental environment. Learning disability, or any synonymous term, is loosely used in today's teaching jargon and too often glibly applied to failures in a classroom without a careful study of the causes.

The majority of students successfully complete any given course because they are capable of handling course matter, student-teacher relationships, and the norms of that particular school system. A number of them are atypical in that they fail or do not succeed.

The question arises: Do these atypical students have serious learning disabilities, such as reading and perceptual deficiencies, or is their learning impeded by the system? This system is actually administered by norms and averages set by the teacher, state, textbooks, and community.

Recognizable symptoms of atypical learners include:

1. The habitual sleeper
2. The apathetic or fatalistic student
3. The poor reader
4. The habitually tardy or absent student
5. The unprepared and ill-equipped student
6. The poor listener
7. The retiring, shy student
8. The disagreeable student
9. The poor logician

If a student is atypical, what are some primary considerations which should be researched before classifying a learning problem and then applying alleviative action?

THE CONSIDERATIONS

Teachers must be aware of the many factors which are involved in learning for all students. The school system, the individual student, relevance of material to be learned, the community-home, and course materials all make a difference.

The School System

Is the school environment one in which conformity is the main objective? If so, nonconformists will be recognizable because they do not fit the norm. A teacher should carefully evaluate the implementation of the objectives of the school in order to create a broad band of axioms and truths from which viable, responsible decisions will be based. Consider the following situation:

RON

Ron attended a high school in a small community. He had a high IQ and a sober, reflecting personality. He was looked upon as "man of the family" by his mother since his father had died. The reliance on him brought him a feeling of independence.

The dominance of a traditional school system was not congruent with his needs. He slept in class, never read assignments, and did not participate in class discussions. When asked to read in class, he would do so only under protest.

Numerous reading, math, and IQ tests were administered in order to locate his problem. There seemed to be no basic skill deficiencies.

After his junior year, Ron was counselled not to return because of his attitude and lack of achievement. Ron quit, but shortly thereafter enrolled in a community college program set up for dropouts. The atmosphere was congenial and relaxed. There were no tardy slips, hall passes, special seats, et cetera. Within a few months his inherent abilities were reborn.

Today Ron owns and operates two businesses in his home town. The school community had overlooked some important practical considerations about Ron before trying to find solutions.

The Student

The type of student enrolled in general business and consumer education courses must be considered when locating and attempting to correct specific problems. The high school student is experiencing extensive physical development and is occupied with integrating social acceptance patterns. Peer approval at the freshman/sophomore levels is of utmost importance and

academic achievement is secondary or even tertiary in the student's hierarchy of immediate goals. Students are questioning the attitudes and mores reflected by teachers, books, parents, and the mass media.

The teacher who recognizes the priorities of students will invariably have fewer problems in class due to minimal goal conflict with students. A thorough knowledge and understanding of young adults is needed before learning problems can be effectively sorted from maturation-based problems. Without this, irresponsible actions and poorly-drawn conclusions can result.

Relevance

The term "relevance" totally saturates business education courses, journals, and books. But try teaching the metric system to educators: resistance, apathy, and disbelief will all rank high in the learning environment. Why? Metric is not relevant or applicable in the daily routine. The metric teacher can stress its future impact on American society, but until metric is a mandatory system, the student will not assimilate or utilize this new knowledge.

An analogy can be drawn between metrics and particular units in general business courses. The teacher is faced with trying mass or individual motivational techniques to promote interest in significant topics for general knowledge but totally irrelevant to teenage students.

It can be agreed that a student learns more easily and retains new knowledge when the subject can be put into use. A case in point is a student named Carl who repeatedly failed to understand and utilize decimals or percentages. Only when his employer showed him its practical application for Carl's part-time job at the automobile dealership, did Carl master the mathematics.

Community/Home

This consideration has strong implications when viewing learning problems in business education courses. A teacher applying a solution to a student-learning problem may encounter difficulties created by community or family-based norms, as in the case of Mary.

MARY

Mary approached most topics positively until a unit on banking and checking. She and others did poorly due to their ethnic background which maintained that checking accounts were not necessary.

The savings section, not the stocks area, of the investment unit, was quite successful. Again, the students' ethnic background dictated that discretionary income be invested strictly in guaranteed safe institutions.

Views on credit indicated suspicion and disdain.

Factory workers have values which are different from those of professional people; consequently, a student of one stratum may be atypical in a particular situation yet typical in another. In some communities, school may be generally viewed as an intermediate step toward further education or training, where others consider school a requirement to be fulfilled before joining the work force. A teacher must be cognizant of these outside forces if a viable and constructive classroom atmosphere is to be tendered.

Course Materials

Finally, consideration should be given to textbooks and support materials used in the classroom. Evaluation of these tools must be made in conjunction with previously stated considerations. Learning problems can stem from poorly conceived or written materials. To assume that business education authors have properly geared their material for a certain group of readers is erroneous. These materials can lead to highly frustrated or indifferent students [illegible] teacher should consciously acknowledge that material which is interesting [illegible] the instructor may be irrelevant and too difficult for certain types of [illegible]. Often teachers tend to choose materials that suit their philosophy, s[illegible] technique without fully considering students' abilities, needs, and preferenc[illegible]

A number of teachers have found that their own self-generated materials are more successful in their classes than some of the more well-known expensive teaching materials on the market. The primary reason for the difference is that the teacher-made materials are tailored to the basic skills and needs of the students in the specific classes.

Educators often rely too heavily upon outside agencies to supply them with the tools needed in the classroom. The objective of business-prepared materials is that of stimulating teacher creativity, not total reliance upon outside assists.

FINAL STATEMENT

The thrust of this article has been focused toward reflecting upon certain initial considerations the teacher should appraise when locating, diagnosing, and correcting learning problems in basic business classes. The availability of test batteries, remedial classes, and materials geared for low-ability students should not become an open door to wholesale stereotyping of atypical students. The teacher has the professional responsibility of evaluating each individual.

LEARNING AND READING DISABILITIES

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Learning disabilities have received increasing attention during the past decade with ever increasing funds being allocated to the alleviation of these perplexing and little understood problems. Learning disabilities appear to be great particularly at the initial stages of instruction, either in the primary grades or at any other point in the school curriculum, when new and heretofore unchallenged skills are required. For example, the first-grade teacher is aware of the problem when certain children are unable to learn the basic skills in reading, writing, or arithmetic. At about the fourth-grade level, when application of the basic skills in content subjects is called for, the teacher again encounters certain children who have previously done satisfactory work but who now seem unable to make progress.

The next milestone appears at the junior-senior high school level in those areas where specific new skills are needed. Some of these skills were previously either not called for or not recognizable due to being hidden by other skills or abilities. It is at this point that the business educator must become aware of the student with specific learning disabilities. The new skills needed for different subjects in business education often result in unexpected difficulties for certain students who would otherwise have been expected to do satisfactory work.

Reading problems are only part of the area of learning disabilities, but to the classroom teacher the student who cannot read well is the most perplexing problem of all. For this reason, the greatest amount of attention must be paid to the student with reading disabilities. The student who has a reading problem because of lack of necessary skills can benefit from instruction at his/her reading level. As the student gains knowledge and confidence in material at the appropriate level, it is possible to teach those reading skills which will allow him/her to progress rapidly. But a student with a learning disability in reading often does not benefit from the developmental approach. This person will need specific types of instruction which may result in his/her being able to bypass those areas of difficulty. It is important that classroom teachers recognize that students with perceptual handicaps involving neurological impairment need specialized assistance which cannot be offered in the regular classrooms. Referral of such students is not only important, but it is also imperative if the difficulty is to be overcome to such a degree that he/she can make satisfactory progress.

A SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITY IS IN ONE AREA

There are many examples of students who have specific learning disabilities, but who are successful in other areas of functioning. Tragically, where learning disabilities are not understood, the student is doomed to failure in all school subjects and eventually leaves school before graduation. This is not to suggest that in co-curricular life he/she is also a failure. There are many examples of the learning-disabled student who selects from the work environment the kind of job which allows avoidance of the area of specific weakness. It is well known that a successful businessperson is allowed specific weaknesses. As a matter of fact, such an individual often flaunts his/her weakness with great relish much to the genuine delight of friends and work associates. Most business instructors are familiar with, and perhaps have said, such things as: "I never could spell," "I can't balance my checkbook so I just don't try." Diversionary tactics are often used such as: "I always round out my check to the nearest dollar," or "I just wrote the check for thirty-nine dollars and ninety-five cents and gave the man a nickel and then didn't have to decide if forty was spelled fourty or forty."

SPECIFIC HELPS IN READING

In order to aid a student who is having difficulty in reading, the teacher in any content area needs to be concerned with two major areas: (1) vocabulary and (2) comprehension. Instead of a complex approach involving many steps which interfere with content instruction, separating instruction into two areas makes the task easier for the student to understand and for the teacher to implement along with other instruction.

Vocabulary. The student should be presented with a minimum number of words in the specialized vocabulary of a particular content area. The teacher may have identified a long list of words; yet the words should be presented to a student in small numbers, perhaps no more than three to five words at any one time. No additional words should be presented until these are thoroughly mastered. It is not wise to let the student know that this is merely the first five of several hundred, for the ultimate goal is too far removed. The goal should be the acquisition of only those words being presented at that time, with adequate praise being offered and rewards in the sense of better grades given at frequent intervals. Speed should not be the goal. In too many instances, the poor reader is put under pressure to go faster so that actually all he/she succeeds in doing is making the same mistakes as before at a faster rate. Obviously, the most efficient way to teach vocabulary is by teaching prefixes, suffixes, and root words. This approach assures that the student will acquire not only a specific word which has been taught, but will also acquire related words. But at the very beginning, the teacher should present specific key vocabulary words, resorting to teaching root words, prefixes, and suffixes once a student has gained assurance that he/she can learn the specialized vocabulary. The teacher should emphasize similarities in words, not differences.

Comprehension. Once a number of specific specialized vocabulary words has been learned, concern shifts to understanding those words when they are used in different contexts. Initially, abstract ideas should be avoided. The words may best be used in sentences involving directions given by the teacher. The check on whether or not the student understood the meaning of the word should not be verbal. Asking a poor reader, "Tell me what this means," only compounds the problem of a less verbal student being forced to deal in an abstract way with a word he/she already has difficulty in learning. When a word is placed in short directions, the check on comprehension is whether or not the student follows the direction. The direction should include a minimum number of steps, perhaps no more than two or three. Even for adults who are good readers, directions which involve following twenty steps are of little or no value. One error along the way can destroy all of the understanding that might have occurred in carrying out the other instructions.

A NEW CHANCE FOR SUCCESS

A major concern to all teachers at the secondary level is that related to "self-fulfilling prophecy." Students with specific learning disabilities in earlier years often become convinced that they cannot learn. As a result they arrive at the secondary level with the emotional overlay that they are incapable of mastering school requirements. These students may correctly be labeled disabled learners because of some inability in a specific area. To extend this handicap to all areas of learning is a gross misinterpretation of their problem. Granted, the business educator has new skills to teach and may therefore uncover some specific learning disabilities not previously recognized. Yet the business educator has an advantage in being able to present to the student with a specific learning disability a set of new skills in which he/she has never encountered failure, e.g., typewriting, shorthand, and accounting skills.

The student may be wary of a new task due to a history of difficulty. But if immediate success experiences are provided, the student sometimes reacts with new hope and previously unseen enthusiasm. This is one of the reasons to avoid using the initial periods in a new subject to review skills supposedly learned earlier, for while this technique may seem educationally sound, it is a perpetuation of the present pattern of the good students getting better while the poor students fall even further behind.

A better approach would be to introduce certain basic new skills which can be easily mastered, but which genuinely require the student to project himself into the task and exert time and energy which results in readily apparent success. It is a mistake to offer watered down assignments in order to achieve early success, for the disabled learner has long since learned the difference between honest requirements and spoonfed pablum. If self-respect is to be maintained, the learner must know that learning is meaningful and requires an honest effort.

PERCEPTUAL PROBLEMS AND READING PROBLEMS

It is the wise teacher who knows when to refer a student who is having difficulty. The student with perceptual problems which involve neurological disorganization needs specialized help. But identifying this student and distinguishing him from the person who has a reading problem which can be helped in a regular classroom is extremely difficult. A wise course of action would be to try to help the student in every way possible, using traditional methods. If these methods do not work, the student should then be referred. It is not expected that the regular classroom teacher can correct perceptual problems, many of which may have physiological causes.

But just as the wise teacher must know when to refer, so also must the teacher be cautious against using such a category as an explanation for all learning problems. The big majority of reading problems can be helped in the regular classroom. They need to be dealt with carefully and with patience, recognizing that many of them have developed an emotional overlay that is probably a greater problem than the reading disability itself. Step-by-step instruction, with assignments which are not out of reach of the students, will be helpful.

ADVANTAGES IN BUSINESS EDUCATION

The student with a specific learning disability at the secondary level must learn to bypass his/her area of difficulty. Remedial instruction is intended to correct problems, but in the area of learning disabilities, particularly at the secondary level, the procedure of bypassing must be employed. The business educator is in a particularly good position to provide such opportunities. As has been mentioned, the fact that some of the skills in business education are new and have therefore not come to be viewed as a failure situation is a major advantage. Equally important is the functional value of the content of business education. The student with learning disabilities has become suspicious of the abstract nature of much of what is being taught. An honest answer to the frequent question, "What good is that going to do me?" might probably be, "Not very much." Business education teachers, fortunately, have a decided advantage in that they can answer such a question in concrete terms, avoiding the ineffective "When you're working, you'll see its value," type of answer. The business education course also has the advantage of providing opportunities for direct involvement.

The student with a learning disability at the secondary level needs to have his or her disability identified if at all possible. It should then be briefly discussed between the teacher and the student. At the same time methods of adapting instruction should be considered. Rigid plans cannot and should not be made, but the student should be made aware that the teacher is willing to adjust, just as the student must also exert the effort and make a commitment to become involved in the learning situation.

Depending upon the type of learning disability, the student may become specialized in one type of activity. The importance of specialization is that it offers an area in which the student can achieve a high level of success, and this very success sometimes aids in overcoming difficulties in other areas. This does not mean that instruction in all other areas ceases, but the teacher must take care to separate the instruction and the grading of those activities in such a way that the area of difficulty does not make success impossible even in the student's area of strength.

CONCLUSION

Learning disabilities have existed as long as children have been asked to learn, but the recognition that such disabilities exist in the secondary school as well as the elementary school is more recent. All teachers have a responsibility to provide for students with learning disabilities, but the business educator has a decided advantage over teachers in other areas. For many of the students the skills required are new and therefore do not represent situations in which the student has already failed, the content of many of the courses allows for student involvement, and the purpose of the course can be explained in more meaningful ways.

Reading disabilities can be helped. Identifying the specialized vocabulary of the subject and teaching it to the students is important. Providing initial success on a few specialized words is important. Whenever possible, prefixes, suffixes, and root words should be taught indicating similarities rather than differences. Comprehension can be improved by using the newly specialized vocabulary words in short, simple directions. The check on comprehension should not be in verbal form, but should be measured by the student's ability to follow the directions he/she has read.

The student with a learning disability in school has in the past too often been viewed as unable to learn. Through recognition of the problem and adaptation of teaching methods and materials, and perhaps the curriculum itself, the learner can learn and can achieve that success which fosters the self-confidence necessary for a meaningful and productive adult life.

MATH? YECH!

Carolyn Brenner
Founder and Director
TIKVAH Institute for Childhood Learning Disabilities
Chicago, Illinois

"As your teacher, I want to tell you something right from the start—I hate math! I flunked it in school and in college. I panic at the sight of more than two numbers. The only things I like are the multiplication tables because I've got a good memory, and I memorized them when I was a kid—and I still remember them. I have no idea of algebra and I never will have, but I spell well, write well, and talk well. The only times I really need math are to find out whether I got the right change or the right amount of salary, or whether I have any money left to spend after I pay my rent, telephone, insurance, and car notes. That's not a lot but it just so happens I need all those things to live decently - so really, I need math to live. I certainly can't make my living with it, but it helps me to live - and that's why it's important - and as much as I hate it, I have to learn it - and I still am learning. The first time I ever got a glimmer of fractions is when Barbara taught it to me last year after Mrs. Stein taught it to her! On the other side of the - you'll pardon the expression - coin, Mrs. Stein is great at math - and she loves it. She thinks it's fun! But she has trouble spelling - so you see, it kind of evens out - just as it does with you. Some of you will be marvelous at math, and some of you just as rotten at it as I am - but the horrible reality is - we've all got to learn it, so let's get at it!

By the way, there are just a couple of rules. It's going to be rough going, so I don't mind a few "damns" or an occasional "Hell" - but no more than that. Try to keep cool and let's work through this together. We don't have grades at Tikvah, so there is no way you can fail - except by refusing to try - and then you're failing yourself. Thus, the teacher isn't failing you. To help you calm your nerves, it's O.K. to chew gum; as a matter of fact we've got it right here - but go easy, the budget won't take too much. We've got eight kids and five packs. You decide how to ration it out so it's fair and equal and let me know when I'm going to have to buy more. That reminds me - Mrs. Stein, could we postpone the math class just for a few minutes? I've got some exciting news for the kids and I need their help. Is it O.K.?

Kids, we're a poor school and we can't afford Venetian blinds for the windows, but a company has offered to donate curtains if we'll give them the measurements! Who's the tallest in the class? O.K., Virgil, please get a tape measure and tell me how high and wide each window is. Check it out with Mrs. Edison to be sure. And Kenny - an interior decorator offered to give us some new tiles to fill in the bare spots on the floor in the art room, the therapy room, and the kitchen. But we have a small problem. The tiles already on the floor are the old-fashioned 12-inch square ones, and they don't make that size anymore. Could you figure out whether we could use the new 9-inch ones - and how many we'll need? Tony can help you. Here's a sample tile, and you better take a note pad and pencil with you.

We're getting lots of requests for brochures. Who wants to help with them? We had 1,500 of them, and I don't know how many have been sent out; but, Tova, if you would bundle them in packages of 25 that would be a big help. And Stephen - if Mrs. Stein shows you how to use this calculator - be very gentle with it, it's expensive - could you make a record for me of how

many brochures are left and how many were sent? Enid, I almost forgot. There's a big food order in the kitchen, but there's no receipt. So as you unpack it, could you total the items on the adding machine? Mrs. Zaloudek will show you how to use it. And Freddie, would you check how many people there are for lunch today and fix the juice and milk—at least 1/2 pint of milk and 4 ounces of juice for each person. David, you're taking care of the chewing gum situation, aren't you? Sorry kids, we'll get to the math lesson tomorrow, but I really would appreciate this help now."

The same type of approach could be used in a public school situation when working with students of below-average computational ability. It is important to provide situations where they realize the necessity of knowing how to compute.

Other important elements in promoting computational skill are the 3 R's of repetition, re-inforcement, and re-iteration. Here is an example of a sequencing model inclusive of the three R's.

Test - Diagnose arithmetic level of student

Teach - Use all 3 modalities - visual, auditory, kinesthetic - in group lesson

Test

Reteach - Use the modality needed for the individual student

Test

Overteach - Group and individual teaching situations

Test

Play - Group and individual games

Test

Students teach each other

Test - Students test each other

In focusing on business education applications, it is important to have initial teaching of such topics as the 6-percent, 60-day method, placement of decimals, and determination of discounts. Drill and other means of repetition as shown above should then be employed to assist the student in mastering the arithmetic concepts and skills.

The requisites for teaching any form of math to learning-disabled students include:

1. Divinely inspired patience

2. Carefully cultivated sense of humor

3. Ability to take the student *very* seriously, the subject matter seriously, and himself or herself - umm - not too seriously.

Possible ways to foster computational ability include the following:

1. Just as in elementary classes, some ninth graders in business education courses might well benefit from learning multiplication tables or the sum of two one-digit numbers by use of a rhythmic pattern. Students could bounce a ball, use a metronome, or even clap hands during the recitation.

2. Students for whom the chalkboard figures mean nothing may do well when they are encouraged to play bingo. Have numbers printed on the bingo cards. The teacher gives the multiplication problem, say 5 times 4. The student must determine the product of 20 and then find whether he has such a number on his card.

3. Fractions and food go well together—not just the inevitable pie. Have students prepare foods for class parties, club activities, or the like from recipes which will involve working with fractions.

4. Algebra's "unknown quantity" might work well with real money. Point out the irony of the situation; money can certainly be an unknown quantity. Certainly 50 + X = 120 can be shown with real or play money dollars and then the algebraic procedure can be taught.

   You can then motivate "interest" working with the PRT=I formula, and then explain the awful pun.

5. The tape recorder gives the student an opportunity to have a private, meaningful, and personal lesson with you, even though you're working with someone else. If you use your knowledge of him/her in the "word problem," learning can certainly be engendered. As an example, the tape might run like this: "You told me you were having some allowance problems, and I'm concerned, Tom. I have an idea. Add up your weekly needs: lunch money, car fare, entertainment, et cetera. Make a specific list and see how far in the hole you are. Then figure out how many hours you have free during the week and weekends in which you might work. Next figure out how much you would need to earn per hour and how many hours you would have to work in order to cover your financial needs. After you've done that, bring me your figures and let's have a talk to see whether we can work out a realistic solution."

6. Spatial problems cause some of the most glaring errors in math. Color coding of the paper can be a simple way for the students to "keep going" until they can find the columns for themselves. The same would be true for columns in accounting until the placement is learned. We even use the magic markers on the typewriters until the student has learned how many "spaces in" for the margins, salutation, and other placement teasers.

7. The abacus is, of course, a great tactile help with place value, but a pair of dice or a deck of cards has a place of value in a fun way of learning math. As an example, have students throw the dice and immediately indicate the sum if the two values are added, the remainder if the smaller is taken from the larger, or the product if the two sums are multiplied.

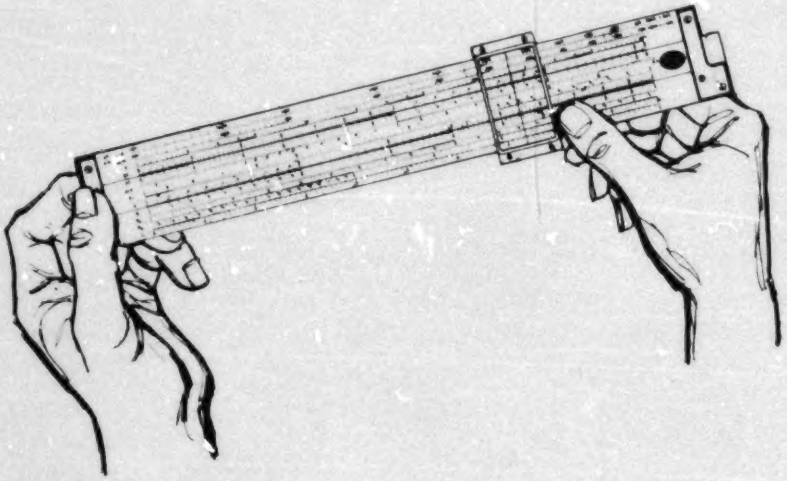
8. Many schools are buying small, inexpensive electronic calculators. The availability of such machines can "spark" a general business, accounting or business mathematics class. They can be used for checking accuracy of computations, or for a new incentive for those who are "refugees" from math.

Final Reminders

1. Everything must be broken down into specific increments and taught in an orderly progression.

2. Be consistent.

3. Enjoy!



UNDERSTANDING AND TEACHING THE DISCOURAGED STUDENT WITH LEARNING AND EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS

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Do your classes have some students who seem to try but still do not learn? Do you have some students who are frequently depressed or have a "don't care" psychological defense? What can a teacher do to diagnose and help such students in need? The answer is "plenty." By understanding, figuring out the problem, and making some in-class adjustments, another failing year for your students can be turned around to a success. Perhaps this is not true for the few severely handicapped, but there are many more students with learning disabilities of a far lesser degree. These young people will be truly grateful and heartened by the special attention they receive.

To work with such students effectively, a need exists for the teacher to realize the nature of learning and emotional disorders, reasons for such disabilities, and effective classroom actions to be used by the teacher. It is the purpose of this article to explore these areas.

NATURE OF LEARNING AND EMOTIONAL DISORDERS

A look into any primary classroom and one can see some examples of the prototypes of learning disabilities. One boy can't read. He has dyslexia or perhaps one of the associated verbal problems, such as spelling deficiency, speech disorder, inability to grasp a lecture, and an inability to recall verbal directions. In mild form it can be noted as a lack of ability, normal for his age and intelligence, to put ideas into words. Since reading and verbal skills occupy most of the time in the primary classroom, this boy is bored and confused.

Another boy is hyperactive. He wiggles, twists, and turns. He is under the table as well as on it. As a second grader he reads well. Therefore, he is not seen as a school problem, except for his behavior. Yet his writing is poor, and generally his motor coordination is equally clumsy. He may have other problems in the visual-motor area such as poor attention while writing, counting, computing, and drawing.

A third boy is withdrawn. He lives in a world of his own. He has few friends, is seen as peculiar. He feels teased and picked on. He may have associated social problems such as being brash and insensitive, having poor eye contact, being hard to motivate by approval. He cannot work at long-term tasks

because he needs immediate success (and also because he cannot use teacher encouragement for substitute success).

There are many ways that learning disabilities can be broken down: disabilities by subject failed, by neurological deficit, or a diagnostic scheme suggested by an educational psychology authority figure. However, factor analysis of the many symptoms results in these three kinds of disorders, with some overlap:

1. Auditory-verbal
2. Visual-motor
3. Social perception-social expression

It should be noted that in all of us some degree of these disabilities can be found. The highly developed visual motor skills of the engineer are usually found with a school history of high mathematics and poor reading and literary ability. The highly verbal teacher talks and reads with fluency, but usually demonstrates a modest ability in mathematics, often at elementary levels. A genius in science may be socially naive. All of our intelligence patterns are as different as our faces, and our learning deficiencies make it easy to understand the learning disabilities of these children.

ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF LEARNING DISABILITIES

Where and how do individuals gain and develop learning disabilities? Identical twins have very similar learning patterns. Fathers of dyslexic boys are often themselves dyslexic. Hyperactive children usually have some history of the disorder on both sides of the family. The evidence points to family history. The disabilities are not initially severe. Usually the mind, in its natural tendency to run with success, will accentuate the development of the strong areas leaving the deficient areas lie fallow. The hyperactice child uses excellent vocabulary, the dyslexic child discovers math.

As time passes, the mind encourages gains even in the less developed areas of function. A certain minimally acceptable status for the individual is reached in these areas. For example, with age the hyperactive child develops better control, and avoids being in desk-job situations wherever possible. This healing of learning disability is like a dog with a sore paw. The dog limps, and gets good at limping. Then, when the paw is stronger, the dog tries to use it and success grows to a subjectively adequate level.

There are two flies in the ointment in this optimistic picture. One is that the deficient area may be too severe for adequate recovery, now or ever. Secondly, and more commonly, is that the child may develop psychological problems. A boy with motor coordination problems bumbles along until fourth grade. There the teacher presses him to write neatly, more written material is expected, and his clumsy production is insufficient. In the vise of papers due and

not enough ability, he finds the teacher buys his excuse of "I forgot." He then becomes proficient in procrastination instead of the writing he cannot do. Another child, a dyslexic boy, finds that if he scowls and looks hateful (as he really feels anyhow) the teacher will call on him less during reading. By adding a few hostile words to the teacher, he can even manage to get sent out of class at reading time. These are examples of personality disorders developing secondarily to learning disabilities. In addition, there are the usual neurotic problems of depression, fears, and agitation. They develop as the child struggles with inner conflicts of values brought on by failure.

By the time the child reaches secondary school, many of these patterns are well entrenched. The primary learning problems need to be understood so that ameliorative action can be taken by the teacher. The secondary emotional problems need the support of successful classroom and social experiences. Here are six ways which can be used to cope with these problems in order to help students in the learning process.

SUGGESTIONS FOR CLASSROOM TEACHERS

1. De-emphasize complicated diagnoses. Identify the student with a problem by his/her struggles, not by a fancy diagnosis. The disorders of behavior and learning are usually mixed in some proportion or other. Those with emotional conflict can have trouble with attention and concentration. Those with learning disabilities can have emotional reactions of depression and tension. Clinical diagnosis is crucial to the clinician, but to the teacher, the student is a person who has come to learn. If the learning process is hampered, a good teacher should give it special attention. Deeper emotional or neurological problems should be left for the specialists.

If you want to call in the school psychologist or psychiatric consultant, fine. However, some teachers do so in order to get rid of the child, to redefine the problem as an illness, or to use the complex report as a shield for inaction. These teachers are not asking for advice in diagnosing the problem and channelling their teaching strategies.

Indeed, some will skip the report conference with the specialist and not even read the summary. When consultants are involved, talk seriously with them asking the hard questions of how their work applies to the teacher and to the student.

There are hundreds of patterns and combinations of emotional and learning disabilities in children. When identified and documented, the result is a formal diagnosis. Yet without a formal diagnosis a teacher will probably not harm, but rather help, the student through the use of the steps which follow.

2. Don't moralize. After all, moralizing is a religious diagnosis from the conformist pedagogy of the 19th century. "You are lazy," "you could do it if you tried harder," "there is no such word as 'can't' ", "if you can answer on a

one-to-one basis, why can't you answer on the test? Students, as well as others, have complex reasons for their behaviors. Being bad on purpose is never a cause in learning and behavioral disorders of the classroom. Neitner does the teacher help by fully accepting the misbehavior. Loving and caring can be expressed better by working at bringing about change.

3. By-pass deficiencies. If the student can't read, emphasize doing and discussing. If the student can't multiply, push forward in English composition and verbal communication. If the student is lazy, use very short-term tasks, deadlines, and checkups. If the student is distractable, plug the gaps with multi-sensory teaching. If the student is aggressive, avoid fights by aiming for another less sensitive area of interaction.

Educational progress is generally not possible with the old "remedial" approach. Recent solid research throws cold water on the thesis that a teacher can reshape any person's basic mental ability by remedial educational techniques. Further, it is simply not good common sense to start teaching a student in trouble by accenting those deficiencies.

4. Teach for success, not quantity. The most well documented fact in all the world's psychological research is: success breeds success. Why not put the thrust of psychology to work for you? Ask not how big or educationally important the day's lesson is for this youth, but rather can he/she succeed? Is the task one the student can probably grasp with speed and adequate comprehension? Small steps are fine. Brief directions and quick responses are good. Avoid having the student fall into errors, which are followed by discouragement and boredom. The best of lectures is without value if students are asleep.

5. Use reward and punishment. The student with problems always needs extra feedback. The student needs to know he/she is being successful. And while success is usually about 200 times as powerful as punishment, an exception occurs with the learning disabled or emotionally disturbed student.

An academically talented student generally knows the standards of good performance for a particular area of study; his/her poor performance on a test is many times sufficient motivation for improvement. This is many times not true for the less talented student. He/she might not be able, for example, to recognize phonetics well enough to realize how badly he/she reads. Perhaps, the student has become so callous to being criticized that he/she is relatively unaware of how others perceive him/her.

Thus, effective punitive measures for educationally disabled children should lie outside but be tied to the learning task to be performed. Examples include decreased free time, demerit points, a Saturday session, or a note home. The good student has more built-in punishments, such as anxiety over threatened failure The learning or emotionally disabled child usually has less anxiety attached to the tasks and can benefit from task-specific punishments.

Roughly speaking, a teacher can expect a 60 percent response in these educationally disabled children by the use of praise, positive feedback, tangible rewards, and extra privileges. A teacher can hope for another 20 percent response by an intense explanation of the material in the lesson. The student must be asked to respond in definite ways to show he/she comprehends through dialogue, articulation, nodding, body language, or effort. Finally, a teacher can pray for another 20 percent educational response by punishment attached to failing the specific tasks which have been carefully designed for the student.

6. Keep up momentum. Persistent small steps pay off. These students are accustomed to short-term reformers working with them, previous teachers who dreamed of quick glory through a key-to-inspire theory. But there is no one keyhole or no one door. A teacher must work with chronic patterns of thinking. These special students require time and persistence. Less than three weeks of improvement is not much. But improvement of more than three months brings signs of a growth of educational momentum, an expectation of success in the student. If the student has experienced small successes day after day, now he/she will come to school prepared to learn. A bad day becomes abnormal in the student's mind, not the ordinary as in the past. Studies of the effect of special education suggest momentum may be its greatest accomplishment. The teacher can commence to build this momentum right away by aiming for success after success in these students.

Finally, there are times in the normal classroom when efforts, as those above, become unproductive. The student doesn't change and continues a pattern of failure. The teacher should recognize these few cases early and transfer them to prevent failure.

If successive failing is happening to more than three students in a given class, it is time to adjust the aims of the class with a more suitable course of study. Such a growing group in a class could suggest a change of motivation in the students entering the class, or possibly a sociological change in the neighborhood. It is, therefore, a new norm for the class, yet one for which these same six aforementioned suggestions can assist. There are many different levels and basic approaches to be taken in teaching any given subject area; thus, changes in overall class composition can be accommodated. Careful changes will help students with similar disabilities and reduce the need for special individual work.

The real key is in trying to make a difference in the student's mind, an educational difference. A difference which wouldn't happen without you, the teacher. There are precious few gains from labels of lazy or sick, but gratifyingly many gains, and permanent ones, from students experiencing success and renewed momentum.

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